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AND THE SHILLUK MIGRATION

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NIKAWNG

AND THE SHILLUK MIGRATION

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The minor details of the Shilluk stories concerning Nikawng vary slightly in different localities, and even the same person may vary his tale a little, when repeating it a second time. Such variations are to be expected in a land where the history has been preserved by word of mouth. They have no ultimate authority to quote except the word of the old men. However the main facts are always the same.

Nikawng was the son of Okwa, Okwa was the son of Moel, Moel was the son of Kolo, Kolo was the son of Omaro, and Omaro was the son of a mysterious river cow. His mother was Nikia the sister of the crocodile.

None of the Shilluks has ever seen the land of his nativity, and they fear that should they ever go there their presumption would be punished by death. They are hazy as to the location of the land, except that in a general way it is up the Nile. They speak of it as the end of the earth, or some call it the head of the earth. It is known as the land of Duwot, and also as the country of Kero. In that land death was not known. When a person became feeble through great age, he was thrown out in the cattle yard, or in the road near it, and the cows would trample him until he had been reduced to the size of an infant, and then he would grow to manhood again.

When Okwa ceased to be king of the country, Nikawng was a candidate for the kingship. He was defeated by his half brother, Duwot. Being unwilling to give allegiance to his half brother, he left the country. The parting was dramatic. As he started to stalk off, Duwot called to him to look behind him. He merely turned his head, and Duwot threw a long sharpened stick after him. It is the same tool that the Shilluks still use for

planting their crops, but it was the symbol of death. It was a warning to Nikawng that he was going to a land where death reigned. The sharpened stick was to be used in digging the graves of his dead. He accepted the stick in a defiant manner. He said : « Some of my people will die, and those who remain will increase before they die ». One of his friends started to run after him to plead with him to remain, but Duwot warned him that he must choose between Duwot and Nikawng. As he seemed to hesitate, Nikawng called without looking back for him to go back to Duwot.

The list of his followers from the land of Duwot frequently varies, but many mention the following as companions of Nikawng in his exile. His sons Bur and Shall went with him, as did his father's wife Ungwedo. Three uncles accompanied him, Moiny, Nyuado and Juok. Three faithful servants are mentioned, Ubogo, Ujul and Mielo. The story often infers that he had other followers, but they are not mentioned by name.

As he journeyed he came to the land of Tura ruled over by the king Dim, who had magical powers. He stopped for a time in the land, and married the daughter of Dim. To this marriage a son was born, who was named Dok. As a lad Dok was very mischievous, and he made trouble for the unfortunate person, who had to watch him. One day a woman, who was taking care of Dok made the unguarded wish that he might soon grow up. The wish was answered in a startling manner, by his immediately attaining immense size. His mischievous proclivities increased as his size. He quarrelled with his cousins, and beat some of them very severely. Dim said : « Nikawng is a fool, but Dok is full of talk » (meaning that he was a man of ideas). Dim then started a contest with Nikawng and Dok. He first hid all the fire so that they could not cook their food. Dok retaliated by striking all the people with blindness. Dim complained to his wives : « Why did Dok blind the people? ». They replied : « Why did you hide the fire? ». He then said : « Let them have fire ». Dok restored sight to the people, but Dim renewed the contest. His next move was to prevent the rain from falling on the fields of Dok and Nikawng. Dok's reply was to strike all of Dim's cattle with blindness. Dim was distressed because he could get no milk, and he again complained to his wives saying : « Why did Dok and Nikawng blind my cattle? ». His wives answered : « Why did you withhold the rain? ». He then said : « Let them have rain », and

his cows were healed. Many give that contest as taking place between Nikawng, and Duwot before Nikawng left his early home.

Defeated in his contest with Dok, Dim determined to be more careful in the next move, and he told his wives to call the old men for a conference. When the conference was opened, he stated the object of the gathering. He said : «Nikawng is hard headed, I want to kill Dok». They then discussed ways and means of accomplishing that feat, and it was decided that after Dok had thrown down his harp before retiring in the evening, they would spear him. It chanced that Dok had a friend present at the conference, and after the plans had been made the conspirators turned to him, and told him that he was to have the honour of killing Dok. Evidently he was a stranger in the country, for when they spoke to him he pretended to be deaf, and they believed him. He made haste to inform Dok of the plot against his life. Dok took a large piece of ambach, and fashioned an image of a man from it. He made it as much like himself as possible, and after it was finished he put all his ornaments on it, and fastened it upright in his house. In the evening he played on his harp as usual. After he finished playing he threw the harp down with a thud, and then he vanished from the room. The would-be assassins heard the sound, and made haste to put their plans into execution. They threw several spears into the image, and it made a sound as though a person had been struck. The image fell, and they ran away thinking that they had killed Dok.

The people gave themselves over to dancing and rejoicing in honour of Dok's death. Dim seemed to take delight in the proceedings, and as a jest he suggested that they have a mourning for Dok. The suggestion pleased the young men well, and they started to hold their mourning. They were singing over and over the same words, «Son of my daughter, Dok son of Nikawng died». They were singing and dancing with great gusto when Dok appeared in their midst. The people were terribly frightened for two causes, in the first place they thought they had seen a spirit, and in the second place, if Dok was really alive they feared his vengeance.

Ubogo went to Nikawng, and told him that the land of Tura was a bad place for them. He was grieved at the dishonour cast on Dok, and he insisted that they leave that land, and go elsewhere. He said that Bur and

Shall were timid, and that all the responsibility for the conflict, and all the fighting would fall on Dok and Nikawng. He was afraid that Dok would be killed. Nikawng agreed with him, and they again started on their wanderings.

The people had not gone far when they came to the sudd. They had many boats, but they were not able to get a way through the tangled river grasses, which had choked the river. Ubogo told Nikawng that if a man should be sacrificed at the edge of the sudd it would open for them. Nikawng told Dok to bring one of his servants to sacrifice him. The suggestion made Dok angry, and he asked Nikawng if he thought that his servants were chickens to be killed in that way. At that point Ubogo stepped forward saying : « I have eaten, my children are with you. Slay me. » They killed him near the edge of the sudd, and when his blood ran into the water, the sudd parted, and the people had a safe passage.

Nikawng reached a place the natives call Kofal. It was a wide place along the river. Nikawng said, Dok and Bur are both headstrong, and brave, and for that reason they will never be able to live in peace if they remain together, and so he sent Bur away to found a country of his own. He said there was no need to send Shall away because he was a coward.

As Bur was leaving Nikawng gave him the mother of Dok, and they started away together. When Dok learned of that fact he was very angry, and he pursued Bur to kill him. He overtook them, and was going to kill Bur, but Dok's mother saved him by taking him on her lap like a baby, and then Dok was afraid to strike him. Baffled in his effort to vent his wrath on Bur he hurried back to talk to Nikawng. He was very angry and Nikawng sought to placate him. He said to Nikawng : « Why did you give my mother away? ». Nikawng then offered him wives, but he refused, and then he offered him cattle to comfort him for the loss of his mother, but again he refused, and Nikawng asked him what he desired as a recompense for the loss of his mother. He said to his father : « I want your daughter for a wife ». His request was granted. He thus became the son-in-law of his own father. A child was born to this union, and Nikawng was very much surprised. He said to Dok : « I thought you would fear to take my daughter ». He replied by asking : « Is not your daughter also a woman? ». For this reason Shilluk young men sometimes

take a wife belonging to the father of the man. Also it gave rise to the custom of the king, taking one of the daughters of the king, when he is being crowned.

Nikawng then came to the Shilluk country. He found the land inhabited, but he was successful in driving out the original inhabitants. The land he took was too large for the people he had with him and he had to get more people to dwell in his land. Conquered peoples to some extent became subjects, and helped to hold the land, but he was not restricted to prisoners. Many people are to be found, who would not be recognized as men, by the ordinary person, but the keen eyes of Nikawng saw that they were people in spite of the fact that they were masquerading as animals.

Each group taken became the head of a subtribe in the tribe. Each follower of Nikawng from his ancestral home became the founder of a subtribe, but they were few in number compared with the number he brought in. Over seventy subtribes are recognized. A few will be given as typical.

Nikawng saw a very active fish. He recognized it instantly as a man in disguise. He tried to take it, but he was disappointed, and he went to get the assistance of Dok. He was able to catch the fish. In his hand it turned to a serpent, and later to a man, and it retained its human form, and he became a colonist under Nikawng.

Nikawng was bitten by a red ant. He was not able to find it. He called Dok in to assist him. Dok went to the place at night, and waited till the ants came out, and began to talk. He then seized them, and they became people.

One day Nikawng was out hunting. On a patch of burned ground he saw some people hunting with dogs. He tried to approach them, but when he came near they would enter the ground with their dogs, and come to the surface farther on. After he was discouraged about catching them he called Dok to his assistance. The next day Dok went after them. He took dogs, hoping to take them in the chase, but he could not get near to them, and their dogs fought his dogs and chased them away. He went home baffled, but not discouraged. The next day he went in his boat, which would glide over the newly burned ground very swiftly. The people saw him and entered the earth, but he sent his boat on at a great speed,

and as they emerged from the ground he caught them, and threw them into the boat. He filled his boat with captives. He finally found that their dogs were their wives in disguise.

One day Dok heard some peculiar noises in a well. He knew that the well was inhabited by men. So that night he went to the well with his servants, and watched. The little men went to call on some women. While they were away, Dok filled the well very carefully so that they could not get back in. On their return he caught them. When he seized them they became rats, then they changed to moons, only to turn to the sun later on, and then they became snakes, after that they became water, and then mud, and finally they turned to small stones. Dok had lost patience, and he called for a hammer to see if what he had was real stone. That scared them, and they cried out, and became men.

Two celestial beings, a man and a woman, quarrelled over the great wooden pestle that the woman used for grinding dura. The woman wanted to grind, and the man wanted to use it in the cow barn. They fought over it, and in their struggle they fell to earth. Nikawng caught them, and made them colonize. The woman taught the people to make the native beer.

One day Nikawng baited a hook with bread, and put it in the river. He caught a man, who indignantly asked : « Why do you catch men? ». Nikawng replied : « If I do not catch people, how can I build up my country? ». In Nikawng's hands he made many changes, in turn he was a snake, crocodile, lion, leopard, hyena, turtle, a great serpent, and as Nikawng was undismayed he became a man, and remained a man.

One day Nikawng saw some people in a boat. He gave chase, but they could submerge their boat and travel under water. They were too difficult for Nikawng. Dok came to his aid and made a net. The people were taken, and settled in his country.

Many other stories are current of the people he captured, and held as slaves to build up the country. One day he saw a mysterious gourd. It moved about in a mysterious manner. He took it and cut it open. In the gourd he found a man, an ostrich, and a crow.

When Nikawng was getting the country settled, he got into trouble with the sun. It took place thus. Whenever Nikawng founded a new village he sacrificed an ox. A cow, which had seen many of its offspring sacrificed

felt indignant, and ran away to the land of the sun. Nikawng sent Mielo to hunt the cow, and he found her in the land of the sun.

Mielo had a difficult journey getting to the sun, but finally he reached that land. He found that the sun set in seven shallow ponds. It entered the first with great heat, and the water boiled and splashed, in the second pool there was less boiling, and by the time he emerged from the seventh pool he was cooled from the heat of day, and went to his house, where his wives remained. He spent the night in his house, and in the morning arose for a new day. Mielo was amazed at the might of the sun and his servants. He was able to secure the cow, and hastened home. (A few maintain that he failed to get the cow.)

Mielo returned to report to Nikawng, and the king asked where he had found the cow, and he replied : «In the land of the sun». Nikawng was surprised, and said : «Does the sun have a land?». Mielo replied : «Yes, and he has a son named Garu, who is as strong as your son Dok». Dok heard that statement, and was displeased that any one should be made equal to him in might. Dok immediately started to have a contest with Garu. He called his servants, and went to the land of the sun. When Nikawng learned that Dok had gone to fight the sun, he was afraid for his son, and he started to help him. He had some of his wives carry jars of water, and others took bundles of long grass. When Dok reached the land of the sun he met two of Garu's wives, and started to make love to them. They asked if he did not fear Garu, and he said no. Just then Garu appeared, and the fight was on. The stories told of the fight vary, but one is, that each cast a spear, and in each case they missed. One struck a lizard, and the other a chameleon. They grappled, and Dok was able to get Garu down. Garu was wearing a fine silver bracelet, which Dok wanted, but he did not want to take the time to get it off, and so he cut off Garu's thumb so that he could remove the bracelet readily. (Others say he cut off the whole hand.) The sun high in the heavens saw the fight, and in great anger he came to the assistance of his son. Dok started to beat a hasty retreat, as he saw that he was in a very serious position. The great heat was overcoming his followers, and he was in flight when he met Nikawng coming to the rescue. Nikawng took the long grass, and dipped it in the water. He then took his stand, and ordered the sun to

retreat, and he threatened to cut off the feet of the sun. Some say that the sun retreated, but others say that Nikawng cut off his feet (rays), and he fell to the earth, and wallowed on the ground. Nikawng said to Mielo : « I am busy fighting the sun, you take some of the water, and revive those who have fallen ». By sprinkling water on them Mielo was able to restore Dok's fallen followers.

The immediate result of the battle was a success for Dok and Nikawng. They carried off eight wives of the sun, and great herds of cattle. However it brought bad results. The sun was displeased, and went to God, and said : « Did you not appoint me to rule the world? How can I rule the world while Dok is cutting off my son's hands, and Nikawng is cutting off my feet? » God said that he would consider the matter.

One day Dok was out hunting, and he came to a great tree out on the plain. Many animals were assembled there. A voice called to Dok to bring his father. When Nikawng was brought, God announced the penalty to be inflicted on them for fighting against the sun. He said that their people would be compelled to pay tribute, and that is the reason that the Shilluks are required to pay their taxes to the government.

According to one story, Nikawng was not deceived by their flattery. He had killed a hippopotamus, and the people had feasted until they were satisfied. They went through a war dance in front of him, and said : « If war should come against you, we would die in front of you in your defence ». Nikawng said : « You would all run away ». He killed another hippopotamus, and after they had feasted again they made the same statement. He again told them that they would flee. He told them to get into his large boat, and he started across the river. Suddenly great waves arose, and the river was divided by a great serpent that reared its head from the water, and came towards Nikawng's boat. All of the people leaped out of the boat into the river except one man, who remained to defend Nikawng. He seized the serpent by its neck, and struggled with it, until Nikawng told him to release it. Nikawng told the man that in the future, when a cow dedicated to Nikawng should be killed, that the neck was to belong to him, and to his descendants. If no descendant of that man is present, when a sacred cow is killed the neck is left on the ground. If some other person should eat it he would die.

Nikawng was successful in making war against the neighbouring tribes, and under his leadership the Shilluks gained many important victories, but even successful warfare may become tiresome. Some of the people were killed, and they became tired of the burdens imposed on them on account of the wars, and they complained of the hardships imposed upon them. Many more murmured secretly. Nikawng was grieved at their complaining, and so he determined to leave them. He announced to them that Dok would succeed him as king, and then he disappeared, but no one saw him go, and they do not know the manner of his going. They maintain very strongly that he did not die. They use many different expressions in telling of the departure of Nikawng. «He returned to his country.» «He went up.» «He was lost.» «He went like the wind.» He became wind.» «He went in the wind.» «He went and lives.» These expressions indicate a little of their belief, and also show its indefiniteness. They say that if Nikawng should die, the whole Shilluk race would perish.

Other signs were manifested, and many victories were won by Nikawng while he led the Shilluks. He was an inventor, and many of the things in every day use by the natives were first made by Nikawng.

His power over the race increased after his departure. He returns, and walks in the country of his people. His spirit may return, and entering a man, through him give warning and advice about the future.

An oft repeated phrase in their song to Nikawng indicates their feeling towards him, «Return to your village, your village is ruined».

To them he was more than man, and less than God, and he now stands between them and God to act as intercessor.

D. S. Oyler.

Note. — Some of our readers may be interested in comparing the narrative here printed with the stories published in Westermann's *The Shilluk People*, Philadelphia and Berlin, 1912, pp. 155 et seq., where Shilluk texts are given as well as a literal translation. Westermann acknowledges in this work the assistance which he received from Mr. Oyler and other missionaries at Doleib Hill, and where variants occur it may be assumed that Mr. Oyler has good reasons for the version here given.

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